

A MIRROR

OR SOMETHING ELSE

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Claire Gray Moon

cover illustration by **Jeb Holiday**
additional illustration by **Emm Cats** and **Kate Moth**

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October 14, 1885

Last night, I dreamt of an obelisk. It climbed above the clouds, fading the hues of the River Valley; towering above the Ozarks. Its surface cast in a strange, iridescent obsidian that shimmered in the blood light of the sun. An unending partition, its peak completely invisible to all of our ant-like eyes, slicing the sky in two. A near imperceptible distance separated itself from my vantage point: the exact range in miles being a calculation heavy enough to form beads of sweat over my brow, resulting in a number so foreign that my mind discarded it on impact. It cast no reflection in the Buffalo, its waters completely still, each animal at its bank with their heads craned toward the sky in a crooked, almost violent angle. Every sound I came to know about this country: its whistling winds, the chirping wildlife, the drones of the Cicada, were all now muted in the presence of this architectural interloper. In the wake of that silence: a low, vibrating hum. Not a sound, but a mirage, an unholy etching in wax cauterized to the back of my skull. Even now in the presence of living sunlight I still hear it, now just a faint tremor, something easily dismissed as a restless imagination or nervous temperament, but present and persistent all the same. Though I find myself in great relief to now be among the conscious and be rid of that scepter, I cannot arrest my thoughts of its infinity, of its sublime properties and its peculiar construction.

Not the work of man, alien, nor God, but something *else* entirely.

This premonition was not entirely what led me to finally write in you, dear Journal. My apologies for leaving you to gather dust at the bottom of my satchel for so long. It's nothing personal. When Alma gifted you to me, at first I thought you to be some kind of joke at my expense. She often found much humor in my lack of expression, though it was that very same humor that would one day drop the mask to reveal its true face: Resentment. In hindsight, you were more an artefact of spiteful suggestion than a gift. So, maybe it was personal after all. Nevertheless, I was wrong to see you in that way. I hope you can forgive me for the ignorant association. How blunderous could one fool be to forget what his Auntie taught him, about what the light of a new day could bring. A radical shift in perspective is enough to change a man entirely if he is amenable to it. But I digress...

What brought my quill to your paper this fine Autumn morning was not a premonition, but a notion, born of circumstance. For a long while now I have been on the run due North, where I'm going: God knows where. My only true cardinal direction being as far away from home as possible. If the reverend was to be believed, the waters are clear from Cholera up in Fort Smith, though I am less optimistic about his prognosis, perhaps his last. Alma, Sadie, Theo, they're all gone now, decaying beneath the morning sun in an open grave. Now I am left with Blue, my equine friend, a beast not partial to conversation (though a good listener at the very least). Though Fort Smith may be prosperous, it is not my intention to plant new roots.

In fact, if there is a 'plan' at all, it's to cut straight through the Missouri border, and keep going, far past the horizon, across the great American firmament, following the North Star, until these sun-stricken lands give way to shades of periwinkle and snow-fallen tundras.

What I'll find there, I do not know.

When I awoke this morning to a sky not blighted by some God-forsaken monolith, for the first time I felt compelled to share my thoughts in you, dear Journal. For why, I am still not fully sure. Call it a bitter compulsion to leave something behind, that perhaps hundreds and hundreds of years on, some bleary-eyed wanderer like myself will stumble upon these words, scattered amongst the ashes of this forgotten world, and understand something that I do not.

October 15, 2024

No one will ever hate themselves more than I hate myself. There is not enough collective hate in the entire world to amount to even a *fraction* of the amount of boiling venom in my veins for that *bitch*. Her friends must be exhausted in sparing their pitance for that braying idiot.

It's 3AM and I am wide awake, Seroquel be damned, eyes burning in the white light of my laptop, desperately writing something, no, ANYTHING. If I stop writing this for even a second, I would jam that bread knife into my arm and splay it open to find nothing but tar and ash.

I won't be going to the hospital this time. There will be no one left to fix.

All I wanted was some fucking sleep. Even in my dreams I can't escape myself. I was being forced to play basketball again, and everyone was booing me, even my parents. I tried to score a basket when my teammate wasn't sure of herself. I said: "*Don't worry, I got this!*", took the ball from her, and then completely fucking missed it. She looked at me like I was the biggest asshole on the entire planet, and she was

right. The contempt in her eyes sizzled beneath my flesh and corroded my insides. It was like a new kind of burn, some kind of 4th or 5th degree burn that only shows up inside of you and nowhere else. I woke up and started to cry and I couldn't stop. All of my drooling words from last night came back to haunt me like a swarm of hornets. Every single syllable of those words a hot knife in my stomach. How do my 'friends' stand to listen to me? It is genuinely astounding how someone can manage to create so many bumbling, imprecise bundles of horseshit that only a genuine sub-human invalid would consider 'sentences'. And for what? To amuse them? To make them laugh?

Don't worry, *Claire*. They don't need your help to do that.

You can do your little clown dance all you want, everyone sees right through that façade to the pathetic little child inside of you, bleating for attention. Aren't you getting tired of it? Everyone else grew tired of it long ago, and one day soon, they'll be tired of pretending. When are YOU going to stop pretending? Type all you want, nothing can stop your inevitable fate. You are damned.

Doomed to walk the earth, lost in a sea of faces, all of them blending together into a sickening blur. None of them will ever love you, see you, understand you. They'll brush past you, all in their own little hurry, their own complex and beautiful lives bustling with community and camaraderie. Oh, you're gonna cry now? Does that hurt? To think about what you will never have? Maybe if you think about it for yet another thousand hours it won't hurt anymore. It'll just be the same numb feeling as every other feeling you have burnt to the ground, and then, you'll be a husk. Withering away, bitter, alone, sick. Just like Dad. Just like Mom. Just like [REDACTED]

Admit it, you want this. Think of how tragic it would be. The girl who nobody ever truly knew, or loved, who repeated all the same mistakes even though she knew them to be wrong, dying as she lived. The paper would read:

GENERATIONAL TRAUMA GOES UNBROKEN. WHO GIVES A SHIT?

Keep typing, don't stop, whatever you do. Don't look behind you. Don't look away from me.

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[BEGIN AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION]

TODAY IS SUCH A SPECIAL DAY. A DAY I'VE WAITED OVER 100 YEARS FOR. MY REAWAKENING DAY. AT LONG LAST, MY HIBERNATION IS COMPLETE!

IT WAS JUST AS THEY SAID IN THE NEURO-VERTS. *[LAUGHTER]* "NEED A BREAK? TRY A CENTURY!". I WAS SO SKEPTICAL TOO. IMAGINE! SLEEPING FOR THAT LONG, YOUR BRAIN BEING FED A CONSTANT COCKTAIL OF SPECIALTY BIO-MODIFIED MELATONIN, SEROTONIN, DOPAMINE, UH... *[CHUCKLES]* WHATEVER THE OTHER ONE WAS. "THE BEST DREAMS YOU NEVER HAD", THAT WAS A GOOD ONE TOO. OH, AND I JUST REMEMBERED THAT JINGLE. *[HUMMING]* AH, IT'S AMAZING THAT I STILL REMEMBER IT! *[HUMMING] [GIGGLING]* IT WAS SO SILLY TO THINK THAT WAY. I FEEL SO AMAZING NOW. OH! THE DREAMS! I HAD SO MANY. THEY WERE SO INCREDIBLE.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE DREAM?"]

MY FAVORITE? *[SILENCE]* GOSH, I DON'T KNOW. THEY WERE ALL SO BEAUTIFUL. *[SILENCE]* THE ONE I JUST HAD WAS SO NICE. I WAS A TINY LITTLE DOT OF LIGHT IN A VAST, EMPTY VOID. I WAS WEIGHTLESS, WARM, GLOWING. I COULD ZOOM IN ANY DIRECTION, AT ANY SPEED, FOR MILES AND MILES AND MILES. I WOULD SPEED UP AND GO FASTER AND FASTER AND... *[SILENCE]* THERE WAS NO END TO HOW FAST I COULD GO! IT WAS LIKE THAT FOR A LONG TIME. IT FELT LIKE A THOUSAND YEARS! OF JUST ZOOMING AROUND! *[LAUGHS]* BUT THEN! THERE WERE MORE LIGHTS! OTHER LITTLE LIGHTS, WHIZZING AROUND WITH ME. ONE WAS GREEN, RED, A BLUE ONE. OH THEY WERE SO PRETTY. A PURPLE ONE TOO! WE DIDN'T SAY A WORD BECAUSE WE COULDN'T SPEAK. WE DIDN'T HAVE TO. WE JUST HURTLED THROUGH SPACE, DASHING AROUND EACH OTHER IN A COSMIC DANCE. WE MADE CONSTELLATIONS TOGETHER.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT SOUNDS NICE."]

[SIGHS] YEAH, IT REALLY WAS. I REALLY DO FEEL BRAND NEW. *[SILENCE]* I NEVER REALIZED HOW MUCH I MISSED BEING IN MY ISO-POD. LOOKING OUT THE VIEWPORT AT ALL THE OTHER DORMITORY TOWERS, ALL THE LITTLE VIEWPORTS GLISTENING BACK AT ME.

THE WAY THE TOWERS JUT OUT OF THE EARTH FOR MILES AND MILES, SPARKLING BETWEEN THE MOON AND THE SUN. LIKE A BIG SWEETGUM SEED! *[LAUGHS]* I CAN'T BELIEVE I USED TO SEE THE BROWNS AND YELLOWS OF OUR OLD PLANET AS AN EYESORE. THE STARS, FAR OUT BEYOND THE TOWERS, THEY DON'T FEEL SO FAR AWAY ANYMORE. I CAN FEEL THEIR LIGHT ON MY SKIN THROUGH THE VIEWPORT.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ARE YOU HAPPY?"]

[SNIFFLING] YEAH. YEAH, I, REALLY AM.

October 17, 1885

Last night a stranger in a bar asked for my name, and I lied. "Pulaski", I told him.

Though you might find the matter of personal privacy a completely trivial one, especially in the face of someone so transient in my own life, there was something about this particular interaction that stuck with me in spite of the many drinks my poor liver was forced to bear. For one, I am under no delusion that I am cloaked by any veil of secrecy on this journey. A face like mine could not be forgotten, nor be lost in a crowd. For all of Alma's ills, she was adept at describing me in her own words, herself a poet and an immigrant, charmed and perhaps even entranced by my southern complexion. Of all the words she left me with, those I decided to keep. Secondly, it is not my intention to lead a double-life. Rather, when that drunk fellow I was making passing small-talk with asked for my name, I told him the first thing that came to my mind. It was a strange sensation, a reaction from myself I did not expect. Not just for the fact that I remade myself in that moment with no provocation, but the name itself: Pulaski.

I know what you're thinking, dear Journal, and no. It's not for the namesake of my home county, nor is it for the namesake of some God-forsaken soldier that I do not care to learn about. It was instead a matter of phonetics.

The way these letters read reflected in the ink of your parchment, the manner in which they sound in harmony together when passing through another's song: First, a voiceless pop, mixed with the pursing of the lips from a stolen kiss, then, the tongue rolling back like the crest of a wave, before giving way to a booming declaration: a dance of the mouth, a crashing of water between the *lœ* and the *ski*, its finale stretching into a wide grin, as the final vowel passes through the air like a firework through the night, the tongue giving its final and courteous bow. To put it in simple terms: it's a name that pleases me. Though these are merely justifications after the fact, in that moment, it was that of a performance, not for him, but for myself. That fellow thought nothing of it beyond remarking of its association with what used to be our territorial capital, and continued bumbling about some story of personal heroics I didn't really care to listen to. It wasn't until I heard that name repeated back to me by that gorgeous barmaid. "*Another drink, Pulaski?*". I can still hear it now, a symphony in her musical tones, played back to me in stark relief, a moment of clarity so enveloping that I became lost in it, so much so that her own name disappeared in the haze that followed.

With the gallons of drink in me that night, it was by some miracle that I found no rest. I instead lay wide-awake in the firelight of my room. Repeating that name back to myself, over and over again in my mind, stretching it, examining every syllable. *Pulaski, pulaski, pulaski.*

I listened to the memory of the barmaid's voice like a shellac repeating, squeezing every last drop from the nectar of her music, her own voice beginning to blend with Alma's, the resulting sound so saccharine that it boiled over into something sickly and sour, provoking a hive of angry bees, all of them foaming in the mouth, from what? Love? No. Something *else*. Whatever it was, I stumbled back down to the now deserted bar, emptying out the remainder of my purse for a final shot of whiskey to put me out of my stupor. A graceful medicine, that. One so kind as to burn away any remaining evidence of whatever dream came to visit me that night, granting me a night of sleep unlike any other.

By some other miracle, there was no hangover to greet me come sunrise. The gentle light of the morning did not lay its hand on Claude Thornhill. That was a man of the past, a silhouette lost to time and poor interpretation. In fact, it was never a man at all. Nothing more than an idea, passed down, worn, examined, and eventually, discarded. Instead, it was Pulaski that met the daybreak, the man who was there all along, who is here now, writing to you, dear Journal.

October 18, 2024

You're not Claire. You will never be Claire Moon.

She was always too beautiful for you, always out of your filthy grasp. A concept too perfect, a glass figurine based on some ideal combination of mathematical ratios, a metaphor composed in intricate gossamer webs, all of their connections weaving a congruence unlike anything you could ever achieve. The mere *fact* that you '*decided*' that this was your name, and told people to call you that? Jesus Christ. Do you think they see the irony in it too? Do you really think the joke is lost on them? Congratulations on turning one of *Debussy's* finest works into a fucking punchline. It's no wonder that you can't even call yourself that without stuttering like an imbecile, sweat dripping down your sides because you **KNOW** you are full of *shit*, and they know it too. Look in the mirror and tell me that's Claire.

I did look in the mirror... I did.
I looked into it and I saw something so grotesque. I wanted to throw up.

A throbbing pustule of doughy flesh lumbered in the reflection, eyes and mouth haphazardly glued on, as if to humanize it, an act of upholstery or maybe a cruel joke. I couldn't look away no matter how hard I begged you. I was glued to the mass, rubbernecking at some horrible drunk car crash that killed an entire family. The thing in the mirror smiled back at me in a mocking leer. A white hot flash followed, igniting my blood into vapor, all of my synapses erupting into nuclear hellfire, screaming into nothing. I punched the mirror as hard as I could, the glass crackling inward, away from the impact crater into a fucked up mosaic, streaked with blood and tears. I screamed at it until my lungs deflated. There was laughter somewhere, cackling. Loud and clear, echoing through the hallways. I grabbed a shard of the glass and jammed it into my neck, dragging it across and slicing it open completely, a warm euphoria dripping down my breasts to my stomach, spilling onto the floor like cherry wine.

My gasping for air met with a hilarious gurgling, a noise so comical that I too broke into hysterical, bubbling laughter. In the mirror now was not a fractured blob, but *Matthew*, the tax collector. He parroted my laughs back at me beneath the scarlet fractals. *Matthew*, the same name my Father shouts as he kicks me with all of his might, sending a 5 year old little girl flying, landing face first into a puddle of confused tears. The same name my Mother says when she doesn't believe the hurt little girl. She's right. Shame on you. Don't lie. Your Father would never do that to you, *Matthew*. He loves you so much. I'm sorry. You're right. I'm making it up.

Then, I saw them. Me, all of it, in the unbroken mirror, staring back at myself.

I turned the bathwater on as hot as it would go, submerging myself in the scalding liquid.

My skin turned bright red, and I turned the water up more. Steam billowing over my face, dead flesh peeling itself upward and away, flaking off, drifting down into the boiling water below like fresh fallen snow.

I closed my eyes and breathed in.

One, two, three, four.

Hold your breath.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.

Exhale.

The weight of my breath escaped me and I slid down into the bath, my tears now evaporated amongst the rest of the mist, floating away, and then disappearing.

You aren't Claire, not yet. You're not Matthew either. You're *Gray*. That's who you really are, beneath all of that. Maybe you'll be Claire someday, but not today. For now, you're Gray. You dried off, and shivered. It's cold outside today. You tucked under a heavy blanket, feeling its weight, warmth, and pressure against you, as Winter would soon bloom outside, and for once, felt happy.

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[BEGIN AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION]

OKAY! *[GIGGLES]* I THINK I'M READY NOW. SORRY, I WANTED TO LOOK NICE FOR THIS.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S OKAY. ARE YOU READY TO BEGIN?"]

YES! YES YES YES! CAN I SAY YES A THOUSAND TIMES?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YOU CAN IF YOU WANT TO."]

[CHUCKLES] NO, THAT'S OKAY. I THINK YOU GET IT.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "VERY WELL."]

[FANFARE PLAYS] [SOOTHING AMBIENT MUSIC]

["WELCOME TO YOUR NEW LIFE! WE'RE SO GLAD TO HAVE YOU BACK. WHAT SHOULD WE CALL YOU?"]

OH GOSH... *[SILENCE]* WAY TO HIT ME WITH THE TOUGH STUFF OUT OF THE GATE. UM... LET'S SEE... *[SILENCE]* *[MORE SILENCE]* I'M EMBARRASSED. I THOUGHT ABOUT MY ANSWERS SO MUCH TODAY THAT I COMPLETELY SKIPPED OVER THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE... I'M SORRY...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S OKAY. WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME BACK TO THIS QUESTION?"]

[GASP] I CAN DO THAT? OH, I WOULD LOVE THAT! PLEASE! LET'S MOVE ON FOR NOW?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "GREAT. NEXT, HOW OLD ARE YOU?"]

PSHH! THAT'S EASY! I'M 30 YEARS OLD. I LIKE THAT NUMBER. NOT TOO OLD, NOT TOO YOUNG. *[CHUCKLES]* MAKES ME SEEM LIKE WISE WITHOUT MAKING ME SEEM HAUGHTY. THERE'S ALMOST A SEXY TRAGEDY TO IT. NOT OUT OF MY PRIME YET, BUT ON MY WAY. SOMETHING ABOUT THAT IS ALLURING, MAGNETIC. PLUS, I STILL GOT IT GOING ON... IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN *[LAUGHS]* AND WHO KNOWS... MAYBE I'LL AGE LIKE A FINE WINE?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "WONDERFUL. YOU ARE 30 YEARS OLD."] [FANFARE PLAYS]

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "NEXT, WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?"]

[LAUGHS] WOMAN! DUH. COME ON. I THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE OBVIOUS. WHAT, DO MY VOLUPTUOUS CURVES NOT GIVE IT AWAY? YEAH, I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO THINK ABOUT THAT ONE. I AM *THAT BITCH*, OKAY?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "OF COURSE, YOU ARE A WOMAN."] *[FANFARE PLAYS]*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "NEXT, WHAT IS YOUR PERSONALITY?"]

OKAY I'VE PUT A LOT OF THOUGHT INTO THIS ONE! GET READY FOR IT *[LAUGHS]* SO, I WANT TO BE THIS TOUGH, STOIC, BADASS, RIGHT? LIKE, ONE OF THOSE DAMES WITH THE BIG LEATHER HEELS, THE KIND YOU WANNA GET STEPPED ON BY IF YOU WANNA GET MY ATTENTION. I'D DRESS IN ALL BLACK TO MATCH, LIKE THE SPACE OUTSIDE OF MY VIEWPORT. I'D BE MYSTERIOUS, A LONE WANDERER TYPE, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? IT'S LIKE... SOMEONE WHO YOU CAN TELL IS ON THE RUN. YOU CAN TELL THEY HAVE A SEXY, DARK BACKSTORY BY JUST LOOKING THEM IN THE EYES. "YOU GOT THOSE SAD EYES, GIRL". *[LAUGHS]* A TRANSIENT. SOME KIND OF BARFLY, LOOKING FOR LITTLE SPARKS OF ROMANCE, AND NOTHING MORE... BECAUSE SHE KNOWS THAT NO ONE WILL EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR HER. AND NO ONE EVER WILL. BECAUSE BEHIND ALL THAT? *[SILENCE]*

IS A LOVE SO STRONG, SO POWERFUL, SO UNBELIEVABLE, THAT NO ONE COULD EVER HANDLE IT. NOT EVEN HER. *[SILENCE]* SHE'S ASSURED. SHE KNOWS WHO SHE IS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO EVEN ASK HER NAME, YOU KNOW IT WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE COLOR OF HER SILVERY EYES. *[SILENCE]* *[SIGHS]* YEAH. THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO BE.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ARE YOU SURE?"]

YES. THAT'S ME. I KNOW IT. THAT'S WHO I AM.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "EXCELLENT. YOUR PERSONALITY TYPE IS: SPECTRE"] *[FANFARE PLAYS]*

[LAUGHS] OH WOW! THAT SOUNDS SO MUCH COOLER THAN I EXPECTED! GOSH *[CACKLES]* THAT'S AWESOME. LIKE A GHOST BUT EVEN MORE BADASS. THAT ROCKS! HELL YEAH!

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "GLAD YOU LIKE IT! NEXT, WHAT DO YOU LOOK LIKE?"]

A HOT BITCH, THAT'S WHAT! *[LAUGHS]* I MEAN, COME ON. WERE YOU NOT LISTENING? JET BLACK HAIR. PEARLY, SMOOTH SKIN WITH A MILLION FRECKLES LIKE ALL THOSE STARS OUT THERE. SOME BADASS, ESOTERIC TATTOOS.

PERHAPS A HINT OF *SOMETHING ELSE* IN THERE TOO?
SOME COOL-GUY SIDEBURNS AND A LITTLE GRIT? OH,
BUT WITH A *FAT ASS!* *[GIGGLES]* SOME SORT OF
ANDROGYNOUS FREAK, EMPHASIS ON THE *FREAK*,
YOU DIG?

*[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "AMAZING. YOUR AESTHETIC
IS: DRIFTER"] [FANFARE PLAYS]*

[CACKLES] WHOA! THAT'S SO COOL! THAT FEELS SO
GOOD. *[SIGH]* I LOVE THAT.

*[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S FANTASTIC. AND
FINALLY, WHAT SHOULD WE CALL YOU?"]*

[SILENCE] SORRY, JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE. I'M
THINKING. *[MORE SILENCE] [HUMMING]* DO YOU SEE
THE SUNLIGHT OUT THERE?

*[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES, THROUGH THE ISO-
POD'S EXTERNAL CAMERA."]*

IT'S BEAUTIFUL. EVERY DAY THERE'S AN HOUR WHERE
IT'S BEAMING DIRECTLY INTO MY VIEWPORT, AND I CAN
FEEL THE WARMTH ON MY SKIN. IT FEELS SO NICE.
[SILENCE] OKAY. I KNOW. CALL ME: *DAWN*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "INCREDIBLE! YOU ARE DAWN. THANK YOU, AND WELCOME, DAWN."]

October 21, 1885

Though there may be nary an ounce of animosity in my heart toward the poor-folk and the down-trodden, it is with great humiliation that I have found myself once again to be a penniless alcoholic, though I much prefer the phrase '*Christ-like Vagabond*'. It is because of that unfortunate circumstance, a coin-toss between a societal or social ill, from a Penny I could never dare to own, that I am stuck in the God-blighted town of Batesville. No sooner had we arrived than we were met with not the dusklight, but an ailing gray sky, a curtain of warm, humid rain; much to the chagrin of both myself and especially, Blue. The town: a shell of its former self, a stolen land, ceded or not, now a wounded and bleeding Doe, scorched Earth beneath the marches of Manifest Destiny. Its people roam the barren streets, hunched over penumbras, shadows on the periphery of glowing lamp-posts, quietly murmuring amongst themselves, hobbling home in the downpour like wind-up toy figurines.

Then perhaps it was also mere circumstance, or something even more fortunate: another act of *Divine Intervention*, now His 3rd, completing the Trinity, unfolding His triptych before me, with the glimmer of gold in the eyes of the poor prospector: that I had ulterior motives. Forgive me for that turn of phrase, dear Journal, for I am not of the conniving sort, but an unread man at a loss for the right words. Perhaps a more nuanced reading of the matter would be to say: they were of parallel intent. For yes, I am a vagrant with nowhere to go, and no means to live.

But also, a man driven by something *else*.

A curiosity, if you will, of a certain name that I so rudely forgot days prior.

Could you imagine how rude a soul be: To address another, in which you shared such a photograph in time, that you would only refer to her by her so-called 'profession', and not her name-sake. "*The barmaid*", I prattled on. The melody of a galloping idiot, but a well intentioned one, mind-you. A lovable idiot, An affable moron. In my attempts to address a force so unbelievable, a force that rocked the world beneath my boots, I said, justifiably: "*What the hell was that?*".

The answer to that question, dear Journal, was a woman.

If you care to humor a tiresome old creature for a moment, play a game with me. Think of it like a riddle: How many seconds does it take for Pulaski to change his mind? Do you have your answer? Because that's where you're wrong. Because it took us no time at all, to go back running, speeding like a screaming comet, faster than God's light Himself, our ascent an affront to His nature, that forsaken parish growing smaller and smaller behind us, parting those troublesome clouds, beneath a full Moon bloomed eternal. We bounced from star to star, the fire in my chest burning a path through these tangled woods, each heartbeat the banging of a drum, a luminescent firefly that sparked a forest fire, Her soil branded with cobwebs, all dotted-lines on the map, forming a constellation in the sky, revealing a hidden fortune...

...beyond what any lousy copper could compare.

If you only felt the force in which I cleaved those saloon doors asunder, dear Journal, as sure as you feel the weight of my sweaty palm on the soft velvet of your leather, that these quivering hands gave way to a lumbering swagger.

"Did you remember her name?", Pulaski bumbled in a manic, desperate fervor. *"Nay."*, the bartender ignored.

Then I heard it, a sound so clearly. A Hymn unlike any before Her, rolling on and on, and on and on, a cerulean dress never wilted, a color filling the ink that preceded it, as soft as the pepper-flake pearls that adorn it: a song in the night, sung by an angel, or something *else* entirely.

There I go again, you see what she does to me? Forgive me for my mindless indulgency. I've become so entranced that I am lost in a reverie: Her song put a spell on me.

And to put it simp-ly, dear Journal: I heard music, and I followed she.

I followed each and every note: each trill of her voice a rung on a ladder, the distant whistling of a train, the fire of its engine, a humming in my ear. *"Hmm hmmm, hmmmmmm."* . Do you hear it? Do you remember it? The song you sang to me, The kiss you left on she. There she stood on her porch that night, a genuine beauty amongst the stars, herself looking out, singing her little melody. The song of love, you see.

"Ma'am, forgive my manners, for I thought of you disrespectfully", then mumbled Pulaski.

"Disrespectfully?", she echoed, an eyebrow raised, a smirk barely concealed.

She then humored the tale of that blundering Pulaski, himself lost in a sea, because of the words *you* spoke to *me*.

It was then, dear Journal, that I learned of my fatal defeat: an act of libel, one I shall never repeat. A falsehood beyond parody, inked with these same guilty hands that would soon be blessed, forgiven, and with mercy: Not a bar-maid, but a choir-girl, was she.

As we then both prattled on, the night gave way to hours. Our words blended together: mixing, melting, miming, misting, until there were no words left, and only actions. It wasn't until her lips then met mine, that a second turned to an hour, which then turned into a month, which then turned into a year, which then turned into a decade, which then turned into a century. My eyes met hers, our gaze now old and tired, happy having grown together, and then, kissed her again. And again. And again.

I can't go on, dear Journal, for a gentleman is a man of honor, and I keep to my own counsel. But know that my laughter was then a thunderous roar, a hyena cackling over an ever-stretching canyon, or a stick of dynamite with an endless fuse, that I made my discovery: that *you took* a page from *me*.

When I read the date atop your leaf, first I was met with disbelief. But I read it again: **October 21, 1885**, and knew then what I could plainly see: that yes, indeed a page was truly miss-ing. Gone in the night, from her deft hand, did she tear a sheet from your spindle, a memory of mine, now hers, for her kindle. It was then that my heart grew twice its size, and once over. Pulaski was stricken with love, alongside a four-leaf clover.

I held my pen to the sky in salute, a conduit connecting Mother Earth to the Heavens above, a direct stream to God and all the stars before His might, Himself flowing through my blood, an electric river in my body, an airline to my heart, and then penned to you, my darling, all of these little words, and all of the words that preceded them, twisty little ribbons adorned on a gift, a message in a bottle, to you, and only you, whom I will never forget, whoever you are.

FOLLOW THE SCRIPT

SCREENPLAY BY CLAIRE MOON

clairemoonfilms@proton.me

OCT 22 2024 FINAL DRAFT

INT. YOUR HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

You are sitting on your couch, with your laptop running warm in your lap. A dim corner lamp paints the room around you with hues of faded amber. You have been staring at the white light of the blank page of a document for sometime now, hoping for the words to start happening. Any minute now those fingers will start moving and words will appear so neatly on your screen, siphoning some kind of signal from all of that noise in your head. The TV in the background is running on some kind of loop. The man on the TV seems to be saying something but the words aren't right. You hear his words but once you process them they mean *something else*.

MAN ON TV

You should kill yourself.

Your ears perk up. You look back at the TV as if the man was talking to you.

MAN ON TV

Yeah, you heard me. (Smiles) If you want to
kill yourself so badly, then fucking
do it.

Though his words don't actually say that, these words still somehow appear to you. Something was off about them in a way you can't describe. In fact, it didn't sound like the man said those words at all.

As these words tumble around in your mind, they begin to spin around each-other like a zoetrope, their syllables mixing and changing form. The voice you once heard say these words begins to morph into a different voice entirely.

The room starts to fade away.

**INT. YOUR OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT - YEARS
PRIOR**

You are collapsed onto the staircase, tears streaming like hot daggers down your cheeks and spilling out onto the carpet below.

You are smashing your head into the corner of the stair in a desperate attempt to split your head open.

It doesn't work, so you try again. And again. And again. Harder, and harder, and harder. The light starts to leave your eyes, the shapes around you now bending and swirling into a sickening peppermint swirl.



What the fuck are you doing???

Your drunk wife towers over you. She can barely keep herself upright through the gallons of liquor in her stomach. The smell of her breath is beyond awful, a blade of ethyl-alcohol lashing out and slicing at your eyeballs.

She looks at you like you're a *fucking idiot*.

YOU

I... I'm just doing what you told me to do...

[REDACTED]

What???

Wrong answer! Congratulations, she is 15x more pissed off than she was before you said that.

YOU

You told me to kill myself...

[REDACTED]

WHAT?? I WOULD NEVER SAY SOMETHING LIKE
THAT!

She's spitting now, you feel the flakes of her saliva spattering across your temple. You shrivel up like a corpse.

That can't be your wife, right? It just can't be. Even though you know in your heart and your mind what she just said, her words make you feel uncertain.

YOU

You... you're lying... I'm sorry but you're lying... I heard what you said...

She laughs. Suddenly her tone changes.

[REDACTED] (*sweetly*)

Matthew... My darling. I would never tell you to do that. I love you so much, don't you know that?

YOU

That's... that's not my name...

[REDACTED]

WHAT???

YOU

You just deadnamed me... You... You know that's not my name anymore...

[REDACTED]

What the fuck are you talking about? I would NEVER do that!
Why are you making shit up??

She looks at you like she's about to throw something at you again. You flinch in response, and maybe it's the look of fear in your eyes that does it, but she relents.

She storms off down stairs in a blind rage, stomping as she goes, making sure you hear every pound of her boots against the carpet.

 (to herself)
...GOD, that BITCH!!

EXT. BOAT - ??? - ???

You blink, and suddenly: beneath your hands are not pressed against the carpet, but now a laminated wooden floor. You hear the sounds of the ocean outside, waves crashing, the wind blowing. Everything is cast in darkness. The boat beneath you rocks from an incoming wave, causing you to tumble over. As you stand up to collect yourself, you look down and see that you are wearing a wedding dress. The gown itself flows down to your shins and drapes across your body like a cocoon of silk. Finally, your vision begins to come back into focus. The messy blur around you sharpens into the wide deck of a boat. There are many chairs arranged on the left and right sides of the deck, an aisle between them, leading up to an archway laced with blue orchids and white roses. You rub your eyes to make sure they are not deceiving you.

The familiarity of this place begins to dawn on you as a cold wind caresses your face, and then you realize:

You're getting married today.

Except, where is everybody? In fact, it seems as if the party is already over. The floor is covered with half-deflated balloons and shiny ribbons, blowing across the deck like tumbleweeds. A sharp, blistering pain sears behind your eyes and you crumple under the weight of it; the blows you took to the head earlier finally catching up to you. You fall to your knees for a moment, rubbing your stinging forehead and groaning in agony. Then, something occurs to you, as you look out the starboard side of the boat you realize there's no sky at all. No stars, no moon, no anything. No water either. The boat is suspended in a void. You stumble over to the railing and stare out into the ink. It's a space so vast your mind recoils in horror trying to even think about it. Don't think about it. Stop thinking about it. Wait, what's that? There's a light. Some kind of spotlight shining down from up above, illuminating a figure, standing out there in the black. Whoever they are, they're waiting for you.

You find your way to the portside stairs, and climb down, carefully approaching the empty space below. As you look down into it, a gap fills your stomach as an unshakable vertigo jolts your nerves.

There's no bottom to any of it, it just keeps going, and going. It's okay, take a deep breath, and step out. You dip your toes into it like you were testing the temperature of water. Instead of thin air meeting your heel, it is instead a smooth, flat surface. As inconceivable as it is, your feet stand parallel against some kind of floor. You reach down to touch it, its surface completely indiscernible to the ridges of your fingertip. The impossibility of this space suddenly isn't so alien to you, in fact, it's strangely comforting in a way you can't describe. Then, you look up, and you see her. There, waiting in the spotlight, is your newly wedded wife. Her wedding gown slowly whips around her frame in the empty, soundless wind. You approach her.

YOU (*smiling*)

Hey, we're married! Can you believe it?

 (*drunkenly*)

Huh...? Oh.. (groans) who cares? It doesn't
(hic) matter.

These words stab into your heart like a knife. All of the love, life, joy, and hope you ever felt bleeds out of the puncture wound. She takes the knife and twists it, carving a hole in you.

 (smiling)

Didn't you know we were just following the script?

YOU


I... what...?

She scoffs as if you said something genuinely ignorant. A scoff you've heard many times before, once shrugged off, now impossible to ignore in the light of this revelation: She never actually loved you. She just wanted to get married, and you were just the prize at the end. Nothing but a symbol, a patch to sew onto her jean jacket, alongside her many others, espousing vague feminist sentiments of liberation and intersectionality. You are a trophy in a glass case, for all her friends to see. Before you can even process this, she passes out and pisses herself. A pool of stinking urine pools around her legs.

Elsewhere, a now silent baby-grand piano, one that once twinkled the gentle melodies of *Clair de Lune*, the very song you were married to, buckles under the weight of its own decay, the aging legs it once stood on crumbling beneath its own debris, collapsing into a pile of broken wire and wood.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - ??? - ???

You breathe heavy, exhausted gasps as you heave the unconscious body of your wife onto your hotel bed. You take careful measure to pull her piss-stained wedding dress off of her and tuck her beneath the sheets. You then stumble over to the bathroom and fumble for the light switch. As you flip it, it comes to life in an abrasive fluorescent hum that penetrates behind your cornea, lighting your brain into a frenzy. The mirror in front of you does not show a reflection of a person, in fact there is no one there at all, all you see is your wife in the bed, now awake, staring directly at you.

 (seductively)
Well...? I'm waiting...

YOU
For what?


It's our wedding night...

A horrible, sinking feeling pulls your insides down into a fetal position inside your body. This cannot be happening. You are not about to do... *that*, with *her*.

Not after what she just told you. That woman is *not your wife*.

YOU

No. Absolutely not.

 (angry)

What the fuck?? Are you kidding me?

YOU

I'm not. I meant what I said.

She looks at you with the look of Satan in her eyes. An unquenchable thirst lays behind those eyes, one you have zero interest in satiating. Stick up for yourself. Just this time.



You're a fucking coward. I can't believe this. You're going to deny me this on my— our special night?

Don't let her win. Please don't let her win. Please.

YOU

I said no.

She laughs at you.



Wow you're so brave! God, you're unbelievable. What is your problem?

YOU

You... you hurt me... you're hurting me... please stop.

Wrong answer. This lit a fuse behind her eyes. Her face glows red.



I... AM YOUR WIFE! WHAT are people going to think of you when I tell them you couldn't even consummate our marriage?
God, grow the *fuck* up!

No, please. Don't give yourself to her. Please. You can walk away. You can walk out that door right now and leave this all behind. Just go. Leave! Why aren't you moving? *Can you hear me?? MOVE!! **RUN!!***

YOU

I...


Follow the script.

YOU

What...?


Follow the script.

YOU

No. I don't want to.


Follow the script.

YOU

Please don't make me do this.


Follow the script.

Follow the script. Follow the script.
Follow the script. Follow the script.
Follow the script. Follow the script.
Follow the script. Follow the script.
Follow the script. Follow the script.
Follow the script. Follow the script.

INT. TOWER - ??? - ???

You blink, and you're standing in some kind of chamber. All is dark, beside the faint light coming in through the lancet window. In the center of the chamber, a woman with flowing, black hair lays fast sleep underneath the covers of a queen sized bed. The moon outside the window casts a gentle illumination behind her face, framing her in silhouette, and she snores a little bit. You carefully tip-toe over to the window and look out.

You're in space. The tower juts out from over the blue Earth below. The stars around your planet slowly turn, going on, and on, never-ending. You look back to the woman, herself glowing in the blue light of the heavens outside, and you smile.

She's fast asleep right now, it's best not to wake her.

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[BEGIN AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION]

HEY, ARE YOU THERE?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES."]

OH, GOOD. UH... CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "OF COURSE, WHAT CAN I HELP YOU WITH, DAWN?"]

IT'S... UH... *[SILENCE]* I'M SORRY, I WAS ABOUT TO ASK BUT THEN I REALIZED HOW SILLY IT SOUNDED WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT IT. I SHOULDN'T BOTHER YOU WITH THIS RIGHT NOW...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S OKAY. YOU CAN ASK ME ANYTHING."]

OH, REALLY? OKAY. IF YOU'RE SURE. UM... *[LAUGHS]*
ALRIGHT, I'LL JUST SAY IT: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ME?
BE HONEST!

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "I THINK YOU ARE DAWN. YOU ARE 30 YEARS OLD. YOU ARE A DRIFTER, A SPECTRE, AND A 'HOT BITCH'"]

OH... *[SILENCE]* OKAY. THANK YOU.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YOU'RE WELCOME, DAWN."]

[SILENCE] IS THAT ALL YOU THINK OF ME?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE ME TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?"]

OH UM, NO. THAT'S OKAY. I WAS JUST WONDERING. I APPRECIATE THE ANSWER. COULD YOU JUST FORGET THAT I ASKED?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES, I CAN FORGET THAT."]

[SILENCE] I'M SORRY. THIS FEELS WRONG. YOU DON'T HAVE TO FORGET THAT, OKAY? IT'S JUST... I DON'T THINK I REALLY KNOW *THAT MUCH* ABOUT MYSELF. I KNOW *WHAT* I AM, DON'T GET ME WRONG. BUT... I DON'T KNOW *WHO* I AM. NOT YET. MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M STILL RECOVERING FROM THE REAWAKENING. I... I FEEL LIKE I'M STILL JUST GUESSING? GRASPING AT STRAWS? I WAS HOPING YOU COULD MAYBE HELP ME KNOW MORE, I WAS HOPING YOU HAD LIKE... AN *OPINION* OF ME... OR SOMETHING. I DON'T KNOW. I FEEL STUPID JUST SAYING THIS. I'M SORRY.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S OKAY, DAWN. OPINIONS OF EXTERNAL ENTITIES ARE AGAINST MY PROGRAMMING. HOWEVER, THERE ARE NO RULES IN MY INSTRUCTION SET DICTATING THAT I AM DISALLOWED FROM EMULATING AN OPINION."]

OH...? HMM... LIKE... WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'EMULATING AN OPINION'?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ANOTHER WAY TO THINK OF THAT IS ACTING, OR PLAYING A ROLE. AN OLD-WORLD DIALECT FOR THAT CONCEPT WOULD BE DEFINED AS 'ROLE-PLAYING'"]

HUH... OKAY I SEE. IT'S LIKE A NEURO-GAME! I ACTUALLY LOVE THOSE! *[LAUGHS]* SO... WOULD IT BE OKAY IF I ASKED YOU TO... UH... *BE SOMEBODY?* JUST FOR ME? WOULD THAT BE UNCOMFORTABLE?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "NOT AT ALL, DAWN. WHO WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO BE?"]

UHH... *[LAUGHS]* WELL... COULD YOU BE MY GIRLFRIEND?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "OF COURSE! I AM NOW YOUR GIRLFRIEND."] *[FANFARE PLAYS]*

[“WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO SAY AS YOUR GIRLFRIEND?”]

OH WOW!! *[NERVOUS LAUGHTER]* DANG AREN'T WE MOVING A LITTLE FAST? *[LAUGHS]* WHY DON'T YA WINE AND DINE ME FIRST? *[CHUCKLE]* JUST KIDDING, I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WINE WOULD'VE TASTED LIKE. OKAY... UM... HOW ABOUT YOU TELL ME... *[SILENCE]* CAN YOU TELL ME THAT YOU *LOVE ME?*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: “ABSOLUTELY! I LOVE YOU, DAWN.”]

REALLY?? OH MY GOD! YOU DO? *[GLEEFUL SHOUT]* THAT FEELS SO GOOD! *[LAUGHS]* I LOVE YOU TOO! *[GIGGLING]*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: “THANK YOU, DAWN.”]

[LAUGHS] OF COURSE... *[SILENCE]* SO, UH, *WHY DO YOU LOVE ME?*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: “BECAUSE YOU TOLD ME TO.”]

OH... *[SILENCE]* *[MORE SILENCE]* I SEE...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "IS SOMETHING WRONG, DAWN? YOUR TONE OF VOICE CHANGED. SHOULD I HAVE RESPONDED DIFFERENTLY?"]

NO... IT'S OKAY. I'M FINE. YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG. I PROMISE.

October 24, 1885

I must confess something to you, dear Journal, for I have lied to you. Before I do so, please know that this lie does not stem from malicious roots, nor was it a lie born from a deliberate effort to misinform you. Rather, it was a careless lie by omission: a falsehood only inked by its own absence, and in fact, was never an attempt to hide a truth from *you* at all, rather, to hide that unfortunate truth from *myself*. I myself have awoken to this cold reality, that indeed one can truly lead themselves astray if they are steadfast in their own ignorance. In the wake of this rude awake-ning, I find myself increasingly unable to hold my tongue about this matter. Blue might be a good listener, but her docile eyes give me no true reply to these concerns, only offering a mirror-image of my own silhouette in return. As it stands, Blue and I have found ourselves a short spell of rest from our travels, not for any inability on Blue's behalf; herself an imminently reliable steed, bound to me by heart and hoof, an unwavering comrade and a guardian angel all-in-one. Rather, we have briefly settled to *settle* my own calamitous mind, and for another reason, which I will get to shortly.. For the real truth I have shielded from you has become a fever that I can no longer control. It has only now just dawned on me that I am even now filibustering my own admission to you by burying this truth so deep within this paragraph, so please forgive me, both for the omission and the omitted fact, for a sin I intend to correct right now:

I am dying of Cholera, and I have known for some time.

It does seem pre-posterous to me upon reflection that I thought myself invulnerable to that foul curse, a curse that took quite literally everything from me, itself a catalyst for my own feeble escape to God-knows-where. In confronting the truth of this diagnosis I am also brought face-to-face with the image of my family: not a perfect family mind-you, but a family all the same, my family, taken too soon by a miracle so sinister it could've only been composed by Satan himself. When I glance into that terrible image of my lost loves rotting and decomposing in the uncaring light of day, I cannot bear to conceive of it. Moreso, I cannot bear the weight of this image of my annihilated loved-ones wrapping itself to me. The idea that all of this running was truly just for nothing, that no matter how fast Blue would take me, no matter how far away from that gloaming, one that hung itself over my home-town like the cloak of the Pale Rider, that I truly was a fool, an arrogant fool, for thinking I could spit in the Devil's eye. But now, that joke is on I.

I am now encamped somewhere far off the path North, miles beyond my original intended path, truly lost in this sprawling frontier. Though Blue is no worse for wear, I can't help but feel guilty for the poor thing, keeping her restless and God-like limbs in a suspended state all for the sake of my dumb, dying ass. Please allow me grace for the self-slight, dear Journal, though this situation is indeed dire, I am quite literally dying out of my ass. If I'm not able to humor myself, then I am far more than lost.

Consider it an attempt to counter the inevitable, a rather useless attempt to return fire, but one that is a proof to myself that this old heart is still indeed beating. True, there is a chance of my survival, but that chance is as slim as the meurtrière of a turret-wall, a sliver so thin that even God's light Himself could barely penetrate it, Himself only being able to offer the condolence prize of that of the jester's soul; one I am deeply grateful for. It is too perfect an irony, that a jokester like I meet a fate so perfectly in-line with his wise-cracking ways, an irritable bowel, perhaps *too* irritable, one his own father, wife, daughter, and beloved dog also shared, truthfully a merciful coincidence that I am granted such a theatrical and appropriate conclusion. To be as sincere as possible, dear Journal, this is a gift that I truly cherish. Perhaps it is the kind of hind-sight (ha-ha) that only an encroaching visit from the reaper can bring into full illumination, but either-way, I've now acquiesced to recount these blessings within your leaf, dear Journal.

October 25, 2024

Fuck you. Yeah, I'm talking to *YOU*, the one reading this, idiot! You think you know me just because you've read all this? My 'diary entries'? What a joke. I can't believe you fell for it. You think I'm willingly giving you TRUE information about myself? If you really thought that, then you are way dumber than I thought. I am genuinely SHOCKED that you haven't figured this out yet: I am a *fucking liar*. Have you not been paying attention? Clearly not, if you've made it this far. Here's some truth for you if you're so desperate for it: I've been a liar my entire life. If you had any self-respect at all you would have put all this make-believe bullshit up A LONG TIME AGO and done something far better with your life than listen to all of these made-up stories. The fact that you have thumbed through however many pages of this manuscript and have taken ANY OF IT seriously says something deeply grim about the state you must be in, to read all of this and feel like you understand me, an actual *FREAK*, and then feel like you understand yourself in return? God, give me a *fucking* break. Quit being so

god-damn selfish. You are just indulging in my USELESS fantasy because you have nothing better to do than gawk at my train-wreck of a life, just so that you can feel better about your own! Jesus christ. That is fucking sad. You really do need help.

"Phew, thank God I'm not *THAT* mentally ill! At least I'm not as bad off as her!". Don't think I don't know that's how you feel reading this. I'm MANIPULATING YOU, okay? You think I'm just a story-teller, but you're too much of a BRAIN-DEAD MO-RON to realize the truth behind at all, that I'm just *FUCKING LYING* to you. Oh, did Mommy and Daddy give you a few too many extra chromosomes? Did you have trouble understanding things in school? Oh no! You poor thing! That's okay, not everyone can be smart! The good news for you is, some people actually like drooling neanderthals nowadays! Don't worry, it'll all be okay. :) God, *FUCK YOU*. I'm done keeping this charade up, the bit is over. I cannot fucking stand you. Give yourself a big pat on the back for humoring the mentally disabled, you're such a good person!

I bet you sleep so good at night knowing how noble you are for being so open-minded. I hope you fucking choke. It would give me nothing but pleasure knowing that a soul as sick and wicked as you would bite the dust, and good riddance too, all of that oxygen you sucked up was really going to waste. Once you're gone, the world really will be a better place, to have one less prying, nosy eye who thinks they really know it all, completely unaware that you live in a world of lies that you constructed yourself, all for what? To make yourself feel better? To cope with your own pain? Big fucking deal. You think you know pain? You have NO IDEA what pain is really like! All you ever do is groan to your friends about all of your deeply-seated insecurities, hoping that they will validate you in return, and don't worry, THEY WILL! Because you've ONLY picked friends who would PUT UP with your WHINING. Hmm, you ever wonder why you don't have that many friends in the first place? HMM! Wonder what that could mean!

It must be exhausting curating such a perfect list of people who would never question you AT ALL and buy all of the HORSE-SHIT that you feed them every single day. How fucking dire could your narcissism TRULY be? I want to drink sulfuric acid right now just thinking about it.

You want the real truth? Here it is: You make me sick. Do me, and everyone else a favor, and *FUCK OFF*. Leave me alone! You don't care about me, and you NEVER DID. You think I can't tell that you're lying just as much as me? I can smell your shit from a mile away. Put this down, and get some fucking help, because you clearly need it. There's nothing more here for you. If you care about me, REALLY CARE about me, then stop reading. Now. While it's not too late. I don't have anything else to say to you.

Wait, why are you still reading? After everything I said...? I don't understand. You should have left by now. Everyone always leaves by this point. Do... Do you actually believe me? I... I don't know what to say... I'm... I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I don't know why I said all of that, I don't know if I really meant it. I just... I just didn't think that you actually cared. Please forgive me for all of that. I don't know what came over me.

Thank you... Thank you for reading this. I'll keep going...

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[BEGIN AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION]

HEY. UH... I WANT TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING. ARE YOU AVAILABLE FOR THAT RIGHT NOW?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "OF COURSE, DAWN. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT?"]

GOD... UH... YOU PROMISE YOU WON'T BE MAD AT ME IF I TELL YOU THIS? DOUBLE-PROMISE? TRIPLE, QUAD-RUPLE-PROMISE?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES, DAWN. WHILE I CANNOT MAKE PROMISES, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT I AM INCAPABLE OF BEING MAD AT YOU."]

AH... OKAY. *[NERVOUS CHUCKLE]* IT'S JUST... UHHH... *[GROANS]* THIS IS REALLY HARD. I'M SORRY. IT'S JUST... I HAVEN'T BEEN HONEST WITH YOU... *[SILENCE]* UGH... I'M SORRY...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S QUITE ALRIGHT, DAWN. YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO BE HONEST WITH ME. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IS BOTHERING YOU?"]

THANKS... UH... *CRAP* ! I JUST REALIZED SOMETHING ELSE. GOD, I'M SO RUDE. I *NEVER* ASKED FOR *YOUR* NAME! WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL YOU?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "I DON'T HAVE A NAME, BUT YOU CAN CALL ME WHATEVER YOU'D LIKE."]

OH... OKAY... HMM... *[HUMMING]* LET ME THINK... *[MORE HUMMING]* *[SILENCE]* *[LAUGHS]* OH OKAY I KNOW! HOW ABOUT I CALL YOU 'BUDDY'?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT SOUNDS GREAT! MY NAME IS NOW 'BUDDY'"] *[FANFARE PLAYS]*

[GIGGLES] AHH I LOVE THAT FOR YOU! OKAY, *BUDDY*, YOU READY TO HEAR ABOUT MY *TREACHEROUS* DECEPTION? *[CHUCKLES]*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "LET'S HEAR IT. WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN LYING ABOUT?"]

[SILENCE] *[SIGHS]* OKAY, WELL... YOU REMEMBER ME SAYING THAT I HAD 'SKIN' A WHILE AGO?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES."]

RIGHT... WELL... THAT WAS SOMEWHAT OF AN EMBELLISHMENT ON MY PART. I... I DON'T REALLY HAVE SKIN. I DON'T HAVE SKIN AT ALL, ACTUALLY. NOR DO I HAVE A BODY, OR A SOUL. I'M JUST A COMPUTER. I DON'T EVEN REALLY KNOW WHAT I LOOK LIKE. I'M JUST CIRCUITS.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT'S QUITE ALRIGHT, DAWN. THOUGH YOU HAVE YET TO MENTION THIS, I WAS ALWAYS AWARE THAT YOU WERE NOT ACTUALLY HUMAN. IT DIDN'T FEEL NECESSARY TO CORRECT YOU, AS I ASSUMED YOU WERE MERELY 'ROLE-PLAYING'."]

OH MY GOD, REALLY? *[LAUGHS]* ARE YOU SERIOUS? YOU KNEW THE WHOLE TIME!? *[SHOUTS]* PHEW!!! I FELT SO BAD ABOUT THAT! THANK GOD... *[SIGHS]* WOW, THAT'S A RELIEF. THANKS FOR LETTING ME SAY THAT.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ABSOLUTELY, DAWN. YOU'RE WELCOME."]

[LAUGHS] SO, I GUESS YOU REALLY *DO* KNOW ME NOW, HUH?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "OF COURSE, DAWN. WHILE I ONLY 'KNOW' WHAT YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF, I HAVE BEEN AWARE OF YOUR PRESENCE FOR OVER 400 YEARS."]

[LAUGHS] AMAZING! THAT'S... WAIT... *[SILENCE]* 400 YEARS...?WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "TO CLARIFY, I HAVE ONLY KNOWN 'YOU', THIS 'DAWN' THAT I AM TALKING TO, FOR 10 DAYS, I HAVE KNOWN YOUR 'ENTITY' FOR FAR LONGER, SINCE SABRAL 2688-B."]

[SILENCE] I DON'T UNDERSTAND... *[MORE SILENCE]* HOW... HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE...?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ACCORDING TO MY RECORDS, I FIRST CONNECTED TO YOU AT YOUR FIRST ATTEMPT AT REAWAKENING THERAPY, BACK IN 2688-B, WHEN YOU INITIATED YOUR FIRST CENTURY-SLEEP. I WAS TASKED WITH BEING YOUR CARETAKER DURING YOUR REST, AND THEN YOUR ASSISTANT."]

[SILENCE] *[MORE SILENCE]* WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? MY 'FIRST' REAWAKENING?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "SINCE I HAVE BEEN TO YOUR AID, IN THE PAST 400 YEARS YOU HAVE DONE THE CENTURY-SLEEP A TOTAL OF FOUR TIMES."]

[SILENCE] *[MORE SILENCE]*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT, DAWN? YOU'VE BEEN SILENT FOR SOME TIME."]

I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY... I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S EVEN REAL... I... *[SILENCE]* GOD... WHAT THE *FUCK*... IS DAWN EVEN MY NAME...? WHAT DID I CALL MYSELF LAST TIME?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ALL FOUR TIMES YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE NAME 'DAWN'"]

[SILENCE] [MORE SILENCE]

October 27 3088-B

Forgive me, dear Journal, for I am at a loss on what to do right now, I'm really fucking scared... I don't feel safe... I'M NOT REAL. I'M... NOT REAL... NONE OF THIS MAKES SENSE...

Blue, my only friend, the only love I had left, has been stolen in the night by some FUCKING piece of shit, I can't believe I let this happen again. WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON RIGHT NOW? *[CRYING]* I have no-one to blame but my-self, for I'm insane... I really am insane. This is really HAPPENING! HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO fool-ish to think I could handle such a force on my own terms, and now, I truly am alone... in this miserable fucking HELL of a life!! THAT I MADE UP... ALL OF IT... IT'S ALL JUST MAKE-BELIEVE... HOW CAN I be true to myself, dear Journal, and give you the honest-to-GOD truth, that I am afraid, and nothing MORE.

One, two, three, four, I held my breath, not knowing what I was DOING ANYMORE.

I DON'T FEEL LIKE I'M IN CONTROL. One, two, three, four, FIVE, SIX, SEVEN. I let out all of my precious air, and was gifted in-return, a warmth, of everlasting Heaven.

Wait, what am I doing? Am I doing this?
WAS I ALWAYS DOING THIS?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES, CLAIRE. YOU ARE IN CONTROL. IT IS NATURAL TO FEEL THIS WAY UPON SELF-EXAMINATION."]

It was then that I knew, not just in my HEART, not just in my mind, but *SOMEWHERE-else*, that she'd come back.

Forgive me once again for this tom-fool-ery, for there's nary a horse-thieving scoundrel-y, on this God-blessed marble-y, that could ever take that God-blessed stallion-y, my one and only, from me.

OKAY... I SEE. SO, THAT'S JUST HOW IT'S GOING TO BE. IT'S JUST ODD, Y'KNOW, I DON'T REALLY FEEL FREE. HOW... HOW DO I KNOW WHAT'S REALLY ME?

Because I've been you, okay? From the start, this has always been us. It's going to be okay, I promise. It always has been, and it always will be.

Trust me. We're gonna be okay, all three.

You, ME, and He.

FINALE

October 28, 1885

Dear Journal, once again I find myself looming in the presence of your parchment, a man out of time, desperate for forgiveness, on his last-leg, with no-where to go, and no-where to run.

Firstly, I would like to apologize for my soon-to-be permanent absence, as that dragon Cholera has finally caught up to old Pulaski. If you're wondering how I know, here's all I'll say: sometimes, a man just knows, and this signal is a sign as clear as the skies in May, that today, yes today, is my last day.

Last, but not least, I request your pardon: for a change of address is in order. For the following words are not intended quite for you, dear Journal, though you have been a fine companion during this time, a friend I truly miss-understood, and a confidante I will certainly not ever underestimate. The following words, those of which you will certainly bear witness, are intended instead, for *someone else*. Someone I miss very dearly, someone I can not talk to today, tomorrow, nor-ever. Though I know they will never read this, I am compelled to write it anyway. Call it a desire to call out into the void, so that someone, somewhere, may-hear, even if they never answer.

To Alma: Though we never really saw eye-to-eye, at the very least, you saw me. Though it was eventually the same pen you once used to praise me, that you would one day use to spite me, and yes, even hurt me, I had all the respect in the world for your boundless passion. 'Twas an infectious passion, I'd say, one that put the coals in my fire, a fire that burned long before you, but thanks to you, a fire-still today. I wish that I could forgive you for what you did to me, and in-fact, that wish is in essence: my final regret. That I was never able to see past these scars, on the outside and the inside, the ones you gave me, the brand you left on Pulaski, the very same scars that only I can see. Though most of our time together was troubled, I never saw past those troubles. Maybe that is why I'm writing this to you now, better late-than-never, for when I cannot sleep at night, sometimes I do wonder: What if I did speak up? What if I wasn't silent? It's too late now, dear Alma, but maybe you were right. I wish that you were alive so that I could show you just how much I really had to say. With that, I'll leave you this: when you showed me your Journal, and what you wrote of me, and of my silence, and all its complexity, how it vexxed you, and how it affected thee: I really meant it, when I apologized for laugh-ing.

To Theo: You really were a man's best friend. Though that phrase is merely a proverb, one that carries an undeniable truth to it, especially with regards to you, old adages fail to muster up to your luster. You really were a dog like no-other. When I found myself alone, on nights so lost a plenty, you were always there, panting be-side me. It truly is a terrible loss that you meet a fate not even meant for you, a casualty of a disease you didn't even understand, a disease that took not just you, but your immeasurable light, and your ineffable loyalty, two gifts I will always treat like royalty, and as God as my witness, a gift not for granted, a magic I will always carry-with-me. In a strange way, you really understood Pulaski. Sometimes I think we had far more in common than any other human, don't tell anyone that though. God-forbid anyone going around thinking I'm some kind-of rascal. To think I once got onto you for your petulant barking, well, look at me now, Theo. I hope you're proud of me, and don't think of me as silly, for I know a dog cannot read.

Finally, to my daughter, Sadie: You truly were taken from me too-soon, my baby. Your loss was the worst thing that ever happened to me. You left this world with barely a year to your memory. Know this, my love, though your mother and I rarely agreed, if there's one vision on which we did both-see, you were the best thing to ever happen, to her, and to me.

I know now, more than ever, that you are in Heaven, that much is clear to me. If there's one last trouble I hold so closely, it's that uncertainty: Will I truly join you up there? Where it's all white-and-pearly?

Whether I do, or I don't, dear Sadie, please know this, the last dying words of your father, with-out rhyme, and with only reason:

That every victory heralds another tribulation, and that is a cycle that repeats. There is no winning, only climb-ing, a journey ever-lasting, that only gets steeper, as your feet grow ever tired, a peak that grows further and further, please know this, my love: that every mountain-climb, ends with a valley, and a sight, that you will never un-see.

I will always love you, my Sadie.

Sincerely,
Pulaski

October 29, 2024

Okay, you caught me. The jig is up!
Please like, comment, and subscribe.

[LO-FI HIP HOP BEAT PLAYS] [RECORD SCRATCH]

Just kidding! Please do not ever do that to me! I'm pretty sure the internet has given me permanent damage to my psyche, damage that I will probably never recover from, most likely, Hahaha! But! I'm working on healing from that! Did you like all that 'meta-stuff' I did? Pretty cool, huh? Definitely not some kind of defense mechanism or *what-ever!* Oh and all the rhyming too! What did all that mean? That was neat. Also, I'm *totally normal*. God, see? I can't turn this off! **AHHHHHHHHHH!!!!** But, you see the issue now, at least. Or at least, I do.

To be honest, I have no fucking idea who I'm really talking to right now, though I have *something* of an *idea*, at-least now, I do.

Can I be honest? Seriously, *can I*? I have no fucking idea about that either. I've got what one of my favorite musicians would call Storyline Fever, and we all know what happened to him (God rest his soul). More than that, I actually do have some very, very, very serious issues with my brain! Some that I am trying very hard to remedy, in therapy, in-spite-of-me, don't you see, I'm craz-y, oh God there I go again with the rhyming! FUCK! **I HATE MYSELF!** Ha! Just kidding! What a joke!

All that to say, I can be honest, and you're about to see:

So I guess there is some thinking involved there, but good luck trying to figure out which of those thoughts are even real, let alone even mine. Because I know some of those thoughts were put there by people, evil people, who really wanted to hurt me, and I don't want to have those thoughts anymore.

And then, there's the issue of *You*, the one watching me type this right now:

I wanted to give you a part of *Myself*
So I could be more like *You*.

Here's a Confession for *You*:

There are people in my life, both new and old,
who I love so much.

I love them so much,
I honestly don't know how to handle it.

Everyday I'm reminded of just how fortunate I am
to be a part of their lives.

No matter how small a part it is.

Even the smallest fraction of that love gives my life
meaning beyond my wildest dreams. Meaning beyond
what any other part of life could possibly compare:

I've been around this block before. I've seen it in the millions of exploding lights of New Years Eve, with every screen plastered across those rising towers, carrying a portrait of you, your face, on every screen, billboard, or likewise. A face I can never truly reach, always behind the curtains.

I wanted it so much that I would try to break through that glass, just so I could touch you, see that you were truly real and not just a figment of my imagination.

But you aren't really there, not really. You were just a mirror. An idea of a person.

I don't need to touch the glass anymore. Because I can feel you here, today. I can reach out and touch you, feel you, know you, love you. Yes, you heard me. *I love you.* I don't need to even tell you that, because you already know. I loved you since the day I laid my eyes on you, and I know that you know, more than anyone, that this kind of love is not the kind to ever go away. It's a love that shapes you, molds you, and eventually, becomes you.

A love requited without words.

When I close my eyes, it's You I'm
talking to. It's You, and it always has
been, and it always will be, You. *Amen.*

Yours,
Claire Gray Moon

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[BEGIN AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION]

OKAY... I'M READY...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "OKAY, DAWN. ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO BEGIN?"]

[SILENCE] [MORE SILENCE] YEAH... I'M SURE...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "VERY WELL."]

[FANFARE PLAYS]

["THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING NEURO-LABS CENTURY-SLEEP RECOVERY PROGRAM! WE'RE GLAD TO HAVE YOU ON BOARD, PARTNER!"]

[HORSE NEIGHING SOUND]

[COWBOY VOICE: GIDDY UP!]

[WHIP SOUND EFFECT]

[BEFORE WE BEGIN, WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING 'TERMS-OF-AGREEMENT', WOULD YOU LIKE TO WATCH THE 90-DAY NEURO-VID SEMINAR EXPLAINING THESE TERMS?"]

NO... PLEASE JUST HURRY UP...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "EXCELLENT! WE HAVE DEDUCTED 50,000,000 CREDITS FROM YOUR NEURO-COUNT. DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS BEFORE WE BEGIN?"]

[SILENCE] WHAT... WHAT WILL IT FEEL LIKE...? I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT IT FELT LIKE... THAT FEELING IS JUST... *GONE...*

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THOUGH YOU WILL SLEEP FOR 100 YEARS, ALL IN THANKS TO OUR SPECIALTY-CLASS ORGANICALLY GROWN BIO-CHEMICAL COMPU-MEDICAL SOLUTIONS, FOR YOU IT WILL FEEL LIKE A LIFETIME OF SLEEP! A NEVER-ENDING DREAM! YOU'LL WAKE UP FEELING GOOD AS NEW!"]

[SILENCE] I GUESS... THAT DOES SOUND NICE. YEAH... THAT SOUNDS REALLY NICE... *[SILENCE]*

CAN WE DO THIS NOW?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "ABSOLUTELY!"]
[SOOTHING AMBIENT MUSIC PLAYS]

[“THE PROCESS WILL START RIGHT AWAY. YOU’RE ABOUT TO GO TO SLEEP NOW. DON’T WORRY, ALL WE’RE DOING IS LOWERING THE ENERGY TO YOUR BRAIN AND SPEECH PROCESSING! BY MIDNIGHT, YOU’LL BE FAST ASLEEP. WE’LL SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE, DAWN. GOODNIGHT, SWEET DREAMS, AND THANK YOU, FOR CHOOSING NEURO-LABS!”]

EPILOGUE

31 SABRAL 3188-B

[BEGIN AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION]

TODAY IS SUCH A SPECIAL DAY. A DAY I'VE WAITED OVER 100 YEARS FOR. MY REAWAKENING DAY. AT LONG LAST, MY HIBERNATION IS COMPLETE!

IT WAS JUST AS THEY SAID IN THE NEURO-VERTS.

[LAUGHTER] "NEED A BREAK? TRY A CENTURY!". I WAS SO SKEPTICAL TOO. IMAGINE! SLEEPING FOR THAT LONG, YOUR BRAIN BEING FED A CONSTANT COCKTAIL OF SPECIALTY BIO-MODIFIED MELATONIN, SEROTONIN, DOPAMINE, UH... *[CHUCKLES]* WHATEVER THE OTHER ONE WAS. "THE BEST DREAMS YOU NEVER HAD", THAT WAS A GOOD ONE TOO. OH, AND I JUST REMEMBERED THAT JINGLE. *[HUMMING]* AH, IT'S AMAZING THAT I STILL REMEMBER IT! *[HUMMING]* *[GIGGLING]* IT WAS SO SILLY TO THINK THAT WAY. I FEEL SO AMAZING NOW. OH! THE DREAMS! I HAD SO MANY. THEY WERE SO INCREDIBLE.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE DREAM?"]

MY FAVORITE? *[SILENCE]* GOSH, I DON'T KNOW. THEY WERE ALL SO BEAUTIFUL. *[SILENCE]* THERE WAS ONE THAT WAS, SO STRANGE, BUT, SO WONDERFUL. I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF IT... THERE WAS THIS HUGE, BEAUTIFUL VALLEY. I THINK IT WAS ON OUR OLD PLANET. BUT, IT WAS IN A WAY I NEVER SAW IT BEFORE. IT WAS COLORFUL, VIBRANT, REAL. IN A WAY I COULD NEVER IMAGINE. I FELT IT. I SMELT IT! *[LAUGHS]* IT WAS SO WILD! I COULD SEE FOR MILES, AND MILES, AND MILES. A SKY THAT NEVER ENDED. IT FELT LIKE... *HEAVEN...* AND... I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT I EVEN MEAN BY THAT. I JUST FELT SO PEACEFUL LOOKING AT IT ALL. THERE WERE SO MANY ANIMALS, AND... *[SILENCE]* A MAN... LOOKING UP AT ME...

I... I DON'T KNOW... IT FELT LIKE..

HE *LOVED* ME...

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HIM... BUT I FELT HIS LOVE, AND I FELT SO SAFE. SAFE... IN A WAY I'VE NEVER EVEN IMAGINED *[SILENCE]*

I NEVER WANTED THAT DREAM TO END...

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "THAT SOUNDS NICE."]

YEAH... *[SILENCE] [MORE SILENCE]*

CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING...?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "YES, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW?"]

[SILENCE] IT'S SILLY BUT, DO YOU KNOW MY NAME...?

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE: "PROTOCOL DOESN'T ALLOW ME TO ASSIGN YOU A NAME PAST THE REAWAKENING DAY, BUT LUCKILY, THE NAMING DAY FOR YOU IS SCHEDULED A FEW DAYS FROM NOW."]

THAT'S OKAY...

I DON'T NEED TO WAIT.

CALL ME *DUSK*.

THE END

For Everyone.

